

Minutes of the East Greenwich School Committee

Budget Workshop

Tuesday, March 28, 2017

Archie R. Cole Middle School Cafetorium

100 Cedar Avenue

East Greenwich, RI 02818

6:00 p.m. Executive Session (Cole Conference Room), Mrs. Winters made a motion at

6:06 p.m. to go into executive session for discussion and/or action regarding those items of business exempt from open meetings under Rhode Island General Laws §42-46-4 and §42-46-5 (a) (2) Paraprofessional Negotiations, Teacher Negotiations. Dr. Sun seconded the motion, which passed 6-0.

Those in attendance were Ms. Carolyn Mark, Chair; Mrs. Mary Ellen Winters, Vice-Chair; Mr. Matt Plain (arrived at 6:10 p.m.); Mr. Michael Fain; Mr. Jeff Dronzek; Dr. Lori McEwen; and Dr. Yan Sun. Dr. Victor Mercurio, Superintendent; and Mr. Bradley Wilson, Director of Student Services were also in attendance.

7:00 p.m. Budget Workshop

I. Call to Order

Ms. Mark called the meeting to order at 7:06 p.m.

II. Budget Workshops FY2018

Ms. Mark provided the context for the budget meeting. The School Committee will adopt the FY2018 budget at the April 4th meeting. The budget is due to the town by April 15th.

The town is scheduled to adopt the budget by June 10th. Ms. Mark gave an overview of the current fiscal situation. Last year the district saw a huge increase in enrollment. The special education department had significant unbudgeted expenses due to the influx of students. Transportation and all-day kindergarten were also significant increases to the FY2017 budget. Budget workshops began in February of 2017. After the budget rollup, it was clear there was a budget gap. District administrators have reviewed the FY2018 budget twice and provided potential cuts. Cuts totaling \$900,000 were provided to the Committee at the last meeting. The Committee then asked for further cuts for this evening. Last night the Town Council approved the hiring of an outside accounting firm to look at the town/school's financial situation. Tonight's budget presentation will be posted on the Superintendent's Field Memo.

Dr. Mercurio reviewed the budget process and noted three meetings have been convened with administration to draft budget reductions. At the last meeting, the Committee asked him to look for cuts of \$2.25 million. Dr. Mercurio further explained the projected fund balance and revenue for FY2017 and FY2018. In order to meet state statute, the FY2018 budget needs to be decreased by \$1,565,562 to get to the maximum request of 4%. A decrease of \$1,905,754 is needed to get to 3%; \$2,245,946 to 2%; \$2,586,138 to 1%; and

\$2,926,330 to a zero % increase. All potential cuts tonight impact students/faculty/staff/administration. Cuts are in no particular order/ranking. Dr. Mercurio reviewed the budget slides and explained what each cut would entail. Dr. Mercurio noted that each teacher is required to participate in fifteen hours of professional development (PD) throughout the academic year. Any reduction in staff will change the delivery of instruction for K-12. Dr. Mercurio noted he has not been in this position (number of budget cuts) in his eight years in East Greenwich. He said if the cuts were actualized, they would fracture the integrity of the district. All cuts have been vetted through administrative council with the goal of impacting the fewest number of students. However, even though the impact is low, Dr. Mercurio said it's hard to quantify what it means to cut a program (i.e., French). Mrs. Winters asked Dr. Mercurio to provide enrollment numbers for French, Latin, and Spanish (at Cole and EGHS).

Mr. Plain discussed the areas that the district is required to offer as set forth in the BEP (Basic Education Program). Those items will not be included in the reductions.

Mr. Plain discussed not filling two positions that are not current positions (Applications Developer - \$71,000 and Capstone offerings - \$25,000). He also discussed the shift in transportation from 2 tiers back to 3 tiers and the cost savings by enforcing walking parameters (i.e., perhaps half bus/1bus). By dropping one bus, the district could save \$75,000. Ms. Mark reminded all that it is illegal in R.I. to charge for busing and sports (pay to play). The Committee discussed

fundraising and the revenue that could be generated from field and building usage.

Ms. Mark opened the floor for public comments/questions/concerns.

Stuart Hallagan, EGHS student, discussed his experiences playing hockey and the benefit of competitive sports.

Nick Sanzi, EGHS student, explained how hockey has helped him and how his high school experience would have been different without this sport.

Annmarie Jurczak, EG parent, asked the Committee to look broadly at all areas for reductions.

Gina Hand, EG swim coach, discussed how the program has grown (doubled). She also explained that the families purchase their own suits and t-shirts. Transportation is only used for injury fund or away games. Foxpoint costs \$125 per hr. (\$11,400/season). Ms. Hand asked if McDermott or Kent County pools could be investigated, as their costs are \$80 per hour.

Brad Turchetta, EG parent, discussed the high taxes people pay to live in EG. He discussed the importance of offering athletics.

Jackson Cronin, EG student, discussed the holistic high school

experience.

Isabella Gentil, EG student, discussed how the athletic program has helped her and her path to pursue an athletic career in college.

Peter Madden, EG community member, expressed his support for the hockey program. He also questioned the willingness of the Town Council to spend money. Mr. Madden stated it's unfair to target only a few sports and asked that the cuts be across the board in athletics.

Emma Macdonald, EG student, discussed the positive impact sports have on students.

Isabella Muratow, EG student, explained how students look forward to moving up to the high school to play sports.

Fiona Chan, EG student, explained that most of the students speaking tonight are seniors. This shows how much the students care about their school. She spoke about the great reputation EG has and the mental/physical benefits especially for females.

Stephan Toljan, EG parent, expressed his support for the athletes. He asked the Committee to look at Barrington's transportation costs vs. East Greenwich's costs. He also said the town should push for their own rink and swimming pool.

Peter Englehart, EG parent, expressed his support for the hockey program.

Jennifer Madden, EG parent, expressed her support for the hockey program and the number of students who play and who will play in the next few years.

Bob Ventura, EG parent, discussed the fundraising efforts of “Friends of EG Hockey.”

He also asked that the cuts be across the board in athletics.

Tracy Barron, EG parent, also discussed fundraising for hockey and said “Friends of EG Hockey” would like to work with the School Committee for a resolution.

John Leisching, EG parent, asked if cuts could be spread across all areas, not just athletics.

Elise Wolff, EG community member/teacher, discussed the experiences her children had in EG and wants all students to have the same experiences.

Sylvie Hack, EG student, explained how athletics are a sanctuary for many students.

Jack Gecawich, EG student, discussed the excellence in EG. He asked that all unite to find a solution and work cohesively. He also discussed the ripple effect (on EGHS) if middle school sports are phased out.

Kristin Pontarelli, EGHS teacher/language department chair, said EG has the best language program in the state. She also discussed the enrollment at Cole.

Irene Qi, EG parent, asked the Committee to cut sports across the board and use creative fundraising.

Annie Lu, EG student, discussed her experiences as a member of the tennis team. She urged the committee not to cut tennis.

Joann Leach, EG community member/teacher, asked the Committee to stand their ground with the Town Council and to make good choices.

Stephan Toljan Jr., EG student, asked why a language program would be phased out if it empowers students.

Ms. Mark thanked all staff members and community members that came out to speak this evening. The portion of the public comments/questions concluded at 9:14 p.m. The Committee resumed the meeting at 9:25 p.m. Ms. Mark announced that next

week's School Committee meeting would take place in the EGHS auditorium.

The Committee discussed the next steps for next week's budget adoption. Due to the unforeseen/unbudgeted expenses for FY2017, the district will need at least a 3% ask to make up for the structural deficit. Step increases for teachers and additional funding for transportation also needs to be covered. Ms. Mark asked if the Committee could have a detailed breakdown of fund balance for next week (i.e., spendable, restricted, etc.). Mr. Plain asked if all cuts provided tonight could stay except athletics and staff (with the exception of the Applications Developer and Capstone). He also discussed possibly taking \$300,000 from fund balance.

Ms. Mark discussed the change in the transportation law this year regarding opt-in/opt-out for bus transportation. Some districts put a policy into effect last year. She asked if those districts could be contacted to find out their savings. Mr. Dronzek said the Transportation Subcommittee is meeting Thursday and will discuss opt-out.

Mrs. Winters would like to see funding stay in capital improvement. She said the district has cut funding for the last ten years. She would also like to see middle school sports reviewed, as there are numerous duplications of offerings in the town. Mr. Dronzek would like to see staffing evaluated throughout the district. The goal for

next week is to look at \$1.5 million in cuts. This would require a 4% ask. Dr. Mercurio will revisit the budget cuts with the administrative team.

III. Adjournment

On a motion by Mr. Fain, which was seconded by Dr. McEwen, the Committee voted

7-0 to adjourn at 10:17 p.m.

CHRISTINE DIMEGLIO

SECRETARY